



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
December 18, 2008

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March 3, 1976

TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: P - Mr. Sisco
E - Mr. Robinson

FROM: IO - Samuel W. Lewis

Strategy for Multilateral Diplomacy in 1976
The Role of the United Nations

This memorandum reviews the main elements of the setting; it then sets forth our principal working objectives; and, finally, it focusses on several key problem areas offering opportunity for innovation and progress toward our goals.

We think we have a fair chance of making some progress on our major problems. But there will be treacherous pitfalls along the way, and events external to the UN can have great impact. We conclude, barring major upheaval like large-scale violence in the Middle East or Southern Africa, that the UN system should be able to contribute positively in 1976 to the central goal advanced in your address before the 30th UNGA,--building an international order in which the newer countries believe they possess a genuine stake.

I. THE SETTING

Factors bearing on our work in the UN system are in considerable flux. Many major problems remain; but some elements are shifting in our favor.

-- Success at the 7th Special Session significantly altered many perceptions as to whether it was possible in a universal multilateral forum to engage in serious dialogue, to pursue concrete initiatives, and to escape the sterility of bloc confrontation. In 1974, following the 6th Special Session, it looked as though the economic sphere had experienced the height of confrontation. But in the fall of 1975, in your speech at the 30th UNGA, you

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praised the 7th Special Session as an example of how the GA ought to pursue its work. By and large this change in perceptions survived the turmoil of the regular UNGA and remains thus far in the CIEC commissions and in LDC preparations for UNCTAD.

-- Widening fissures have been opening in the solidarity of nonaligned coalitions. Although majorities existed at the last UNGA for some highly objectionable resolutions, it is probably of more long-range significance that radical leaders found it increasingly difficult to produce overwhelming majorities for extreme resolutions. (A more detailed analysis of the "breaking up of the blocs" is attached.)

-- Our intensified effort to call governments to account for irresponsible actions by their representatives has hardly produced a revolution of responsibility. Nevertheless, we can see some improvement, and the potential for more.

-- Some signs have appeared that nonaligned delegations are showing dissatisfaction with their extremist leadership. For example, an Algerian hardliner seeking reelection as the leader of the Group of 77 at UNESCO was supplanted by an Iranian; we were told that the cause was dissatisfaction with confrontational policies. Sri Lanka will be taking over leadership of the nonaligned this summer in place of Algeria. There are already indications that Sri Lanka intends to try, within its limits, to steer a more moderate course.

-- Although many had feared in early 1975 that "politicization" was a spreading disease that would infect and debilitate the specialized agencies, we saw throughout the year that the agencies were generally continuing to perform competently their assigned technical tasks.

-- There have been pluses and minuses in working with our friends. They have been fairly energetic on some issues of importance, like the Zionism issue. On the other hand, timidity in countering attacks and a proclivity to avoid taking unpopular stands are likely to persist.

-- The Security Council has been notable for serious and responsible work. Its agenda has been heavy and there

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are some indications that Third World countries may increasingly be regarding it as a vital arena for conflict resolution diplomacy.

But despite these generally favorable elements, the fundamental features of the problem remain. We are dealing in the UN framework with countries deeply dissatisfied with the cards they were dealt when they became nations. Their impatience to narrow gulfs of inequality, to remove quickly what they regard as fundamental injustices, will ensure that it remains a formidable task to muster support for what may actually be feasible,--gradual, partial, practical measures.

In this environment, we face some far-reaching and intellectually challenging questions:

-- Can a strengthened U.S. multilateral diplomatic effort produce more than ephemeral and token changes,-- the shifting of a few votes? Can it engender a significant and lasting increase in responsibility in the way governments approach multilateral enterprises?

-- Can our leadership in dealing with global development problems, which we seized at the 7th Special Session through an arresting and unprecedented array of proposals, be sustained as easier steps are accomplished and more intractable problems come to the fore? Will constraints on our freedom of action in an election year be minor or decisive?

-- Can we continue to use the UN, and particularly the Security Council, to reinforce the thrust of our major diplomatic initiatives, as peacekeeping decisions have done in the Middle East? Or, will conditions outside the UN, such as a glacial pace in Middle East negotiations, produce dramatic steps, like exclusion of Israel from the General Assembly, which would put at risk the future of the UN itself?

-- Will the American public and the Congress perceive that multilateral forums, including the UN system, despite their difficulties, offer unique opportunities to advance U.S. approaches to the management of global problems? Or, will there be a withdrawal of essential support, including severe reductions in contributions, which could cripple our capability?

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II. OBJECTIVES

Our most important working objectives for this year are the following:

-- Protect and strengthen the effectiveness, responsibility, and prestige of the Security Council, which will remain for the United States the paramount body within the UN system.

-- Build up our new operational capacity to relate multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, so that we create more incentives and deterrents to promote more responsible behavior in international organizations, less gratuitous hostility, greater readiness to deal with issues on their individual merits, continued erosion of bloc voting, and overall, more support for U.S. positions on critical issues.

-- Develop more effective means of concerting with our allies, both to enhance support for our positive initiatives and to defend more staunchly Western interests when they are subjected to irresponsible or hostile attack.

-- Maintain the initiative in dealing with issues of economic interdependence and global development which we seized at the 7th Special Session.

-- Pursue throughout the UN system what is essentially a functional approach, by taking initiatives and promoting projects in areas where broad mutual interests exist and common benefits can be realized, thereby gradually expanding the area of consensus and increasing the common stake in an effective UN system.

-- Work to strengthen specialized agencies as organizations where serious, competent work is done on their assigned technical, economic, and social missions.

-- Continue in the General Assembly and elsewhere to counter firmly and forcefully when we are attacked, both to show others that cheap shots are not cost-free and to maintain support and confidence from the American public.

-- Promote sound proposals to improve the structure and functioning of the United Nations, including the goals we advanced at the Seventh Special Session for restructuring the economic and social side of the UN's work.

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-- Intensify our efforts with Congress and the public to maintain essential support, particularly financial support, for activities within the United Nations system.

III. MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS

A. Development of more effective multilateral diplomacy.

Our efforts will have wide sweep:

-- Covering both political and economic issues;

-- Affecting not merely relations with LDCs, but also with our friends and allies,--in order to stiffen spines;

-- Dealing not solely with the UNGA, where difficulties have been most notorious, but also with the specialized agencies where practical reasons for promoting responsible diplomacy are especially compelling.

During the course of the year, we will be testing some innovative, and we hope productive, concepts:

(1) Development of incentives and mutual goals.

Through a more continuous dialogue between our embassies and foreign ministries, it should be possible to acquire a better catalogue of the goals of individual countries, both LDCs and allies, within multilateral organizations. This would cover not only major substantive interests, but also relatively minor objectives, like the desire to serve on various committees. We should then be better able to identify some realistic "carrots",--early offers of US support--, which can be brought to bear to influence behavior. (We would also, of course, be identifying potential "sticks",--the withholding of our support in the event of uncooperative behavior.) This approach can have several advantages:

-- It would be more usable (and therefore more credible) than many of the threats we have heretofore considered, because it would involve retribution of a comparable order of magnitude and because there would be a closer relationship between the offense (misbehavior at the UN) and our response (withholding or granting of support at the UN).

-- It could apply to large and influential countries as well as to weak ones. An anomaly and flaw in our

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approach to date has been that countries most responsible for causing us difficulties in the UN system, like Algeria and Mexico, are exempted from threats of retaliation because, quite properly, we cannot prejudice larger interests involved in our relationships outside the UN.

-- Our allies, who particularly need our support to gain their ends within the UN system, might find it increasingly in their interest to be more staunchly supportive if they found that our staunchness in behalf of their causes, while offered generously, was not immutable.

(2) Encouragement of greater responsibility. Throughout the UN system, many representatives receive only very general instructions,--"stick with the nonaligned group". As a result, many have felt free to play whatever role, constructive or destructive, which they find congenial and personally rewarding. This affects many activities,--drafting resolutions, proposing amendments, leading the opposition in negotiations, taking the floor to make extreme statements,--all of which can have an important effect, not only on the climate of a meeting, but on the shape of the final vote.

By more frequent and earlier contacts with foreign offices, some of our embassies, better armed with substantive arguments, should be able to encourage the issuance of more detailed instructions. Protesting irresponsible or gratuitously hostile behavior should gradually bring home to foreign ministers that a new standard of care and involvement is required if governments want to avoid burdening their bilateral relations with us merely because of free-wheeling activities by a UN representative.

An essential supporting element in this effort will, of course, be more detailed monitoring of how representatives of countries conduct themselves in a myriad of UN activities, not merely at the time of voting. USUN has begun more detailed reporting of this sort. We will also be establishing this approach throughout the system.

(3) Improved selection of issues for major diplomatic efforts. It is crucially important that we select very carefully, and as far in advance as possible, those issues which are so vital that we warn other governments that their votes may affect our bilateral relations. We must

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keep in mind that we often have a choice whether U.S. interests are better served by staging a major campaign in order to lessen the size of a majority against us (and also to show that we cannot be rolled over easily) or, alternatively, whether it is more in our interest to hold back and deprive our opponents of the fruits of a more dramatic victory which results when we go to the mat but lose decisively anyway.

Such choices obviously cannot be made in the abstract. However, we should preserve, and be prepared occasionally to utilize, the option of disregarding some votes even before they take place. UNGA resolutions, except those dealing with budgetary and administrative issues, are only recommendations. Some are important; some are not. We should be wary of falling into the trap of attaching enormous importance to an issue before a vote, and only after it is lost saying that the resolution is of little practical significance because we are ignoring it.

B. Selective non-participation in UN activities.

During the past year we have gained some advantage through a more flexible approach to participation,-- declining to participate in some activities which we did not support and did not think could have any useful results:

-- During consideration of the UNGA resolution equating Zionism and racism, we announced that we would not participate in any activities directly falling under the "Decade to Combat Racism". Although this did not stop the Assembly from adopting the resolution, we believe our firm stand gave the Africans, in particular, second thoughts about the wisdom of letting a situation develop in which over the longer term they lose more than they gain.

-- A more specific illustration occurred recently when we instructed our UNESCO representative to inform the Director General that we would not participate in a meeting of experts to draft a UNESCO declaration on racism. The meeting was postponed. Although we cannot be sure of precise cause and effect, since there was also considerable dissatisfaction on the part of others, the effect was clearly salutary.

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There is a wide spectrum of situations to which non-participation might be applicable, and in every case we will have to weigh carefully whether we stand more to lose or gain by staying away. As a general matter, however, selective non-participation in appropriate cases can demonstrate forcefully that all elements of the UN system are not of equal importance to us, that we will not passively go along with any UN enterprise no matter how ill-conceived,--and at the same time non-participation can be carried out without indicating that we are washing our hands of the UN as a whole. There are likely to be more situations in 1976 in which we will wish to recommend US non-participation.

C. Maintaining global economic leadership.

In our view, there remains a large opening for United States leadership in promoting realistic measures. A few LDCs may feel somewhat safer and stronger as the world economy revives, and consequently less disposed toward compromise; but most LDCs will continue to confront gigantic and sobering difficulties clearly unmanageable by their own efforts and will see value in effective cooperation. In this situation, we think the US approach, both in the UN and related forums, should include these elements:

-- Concrete proposals. No factor was more crucial to success at the Seventh Special Session than our ability to put forth specific action proposals. We need not propose again this year such a sweeping and comprehensive list of new initiatives. However, we have by no means exhausted the opportunities for imaginative refinements or a few new elements within the vast realm of subjects comprehended by the Special Session, and now by the CIEC. The UNCTAD ministerial meeting in May will require the United States to make some specific new proposals. The tone and concreteness of our approach to UNCTAD will be a major determinant of the political atmosphere throughout the UN system this year.

-- Promoting the U.S. philosophy. We also learned from the Special Session that we must undertake sustained efforts to win our points. The Special Session was not the result of a quick master stroke. A vital ingredient was the long, almost continuous series of major speeches which you delivered, and our supporting diplomatic contacts,

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hammering away at fundamental propositions which gradually began to take hold. Within the UN system, we intend to use the many meetings on economic and development subjects as occasions for continuing this same kind of patient approach. At a recent meeting of the UN Development Program's governing council, for example, the United States delivered a major presentation based on our Special Session initiatives and their progress.

-- Preserving flexibility to utilize different forums.
It is important that we encourage others to join with us in serious negotiations in limited, technical forums. We will have to formulate positions on complex relationships between many of these bodies and the major organs of the UN system. In this process, we will best serve our basic purposes if we avoid locking horns with the LDCs over whether various parts of the UN system, such as the GA, the UNCTAD, or the ECOSOC, should be permitted to hold discussions, to record judgments, to develop guidelines, about important issues. We saw in the Special Session that we can exert enough influence to prevent UNGA debates from prejudicing what we want to do elsewhere in limited or specialized forums. In fact, the Special Session promoted what we want to do elsewhere. We should continue this approach, which concentrates on substance and persuasion and education, as opposed to getting sidetracked with jurisdictional struggles that we are likely to lose anyway.

-- Putting further behind us the "New International Economic Order" and the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties. It will simply not be in our power to extirpate the symbolic appeal NIEO and CERDS have acquired. We can, however, try gradually to neutralize their political effect by maintaining momentum on practical steps of the sort we favor. This type of approach would have been harmed at the Special Session, and would be harmed in future major meetings like the UNCTAD, if we permitted others to engage us in bitter struggles over essentially ritualistic formulas regarding the NIEO and the CERDS. We should do everything in our power to avoid conflict with the LDCs over legalistic formulas, as opposed to concentrating on the merits of concrete substantive proposals.

D. Human Rights.

In the last two years, we have been increasingly assertive regarding human rights,--presenting two initiatives

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on torture, adopting a much more forthcoming stand on UN investigative procedures, voting our convictions regarding abuses in Chile, and launching the amnesty initiative. We will be presented both with opportunities and difficulties:

-- Our principal opportunity will be to bear down on achieving modest but significant practical gains, like the strengthening of UN human rights machinery, and possibly achievement of our initiative to establish an experts group to study torture objectively.

-- We should continue to speak out against double standards and in behalf of certain fundamental propositions, for example, that people should not be incarcerated for their political beliefs. But, we should try to avoid proceeding in a way which seems to result in "defeats" for us and "victories" for those who oppose us.

-- Overall, our increasingly active participation in UN human rights work offers us an opportunity to respond to Congressional pressures for a more forward US posture, in a setting which engenders less resentment than would US pressure on friendly governments in a purely bilateral framework.

E. Public perceptions of the United Nations and the problem of Israeli exclusion.

Public support for the UN seems to be declining sharply. This disenchantment is likely to be reflected in reduced Congressional support for our financial contributions to various UN activities. Even as to our basic UN assessed dues, a larger number of Congressmen than in many years are introducing draft legislation that would arbitrarily cut the US contribution ceiling drastically below the present 25 per cent.

Although the public perception of our difficulties at the UN has greatly heightened, the objective facts regarding UN performance have not basically changed. We intend to intensify our efforts to explain to the American people the many ways in which various parts of the UN system directly serve American interests. We can also validly begin saying that a more assertive approach to participation in the UN is paying some practical dividends. Most Americans and the Congress are much more likely to continue to support our efforts, and pay for them, if they feel we are not engaged in a virtually hopeless struggle.

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The wild card in the pack, however, could well be the question of Israeli participation in the General Assembly. Last year, a plan led by Arab extremists to exclude Israel from the GA, using the South African model, was aborted largely because of Egypt's influence and the reluctance of African moderates. There have been some indications that the Syrians are again considering a diplomatic offensive on this issue during the summer. If political or military conflict in Southern Africa escalates sharply, such an effort would have a much better chance of succeeding. Many African governments would then be loath to withhold their support for the Arab cause in fear that the Arabs would not support them in the struggle which they regard as transcendent. And if an effort to exclude Israel were successful in this election year (or even if it came close to succeeding), the reaction of the American people and Congress against the United Nations itself could be devastating.

Because of the enormous importance of this issue, we are planning to conduct discussions with a large number of nonaligned countries throughout the year to try to influence their views before they attend various regional and other nonaligned meetings at which participants may be pressured to lock themselves into a unified position. We will argue that a move to expel Israel would create the gravest possible threat to the viability of the organization, and that the precedent of trying to "punish" a relatively small country for unpopular policies could bite back at almost any small country which in the future may find itself in serious disfavor with the majority.

If you visit Africa this spring, your meetings with key African moderates could well tip the balance against any such Arab initiative,--and the topic should certainly be on your agenda.

* * * * *

Although the challenge is formidable, there is nevertheless a reasonable chance of making headway this year towards our goals,--assuming there are no major international upheavals. This does not mean that the UN will be transformed into a congenial arena for realizing American

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objectives. It will not. We cannot expect an end to hostile initiatives and offensive rhetoric. But we can reasonably hope to see increasing seriousness and responsibility in the way at least some governments approach multilateral problems.

Our intensified effort to bring to bear more effectively our diplomatic resources and to tackle systematically the substance of North-South economic problems is having some positive impact. Quick or total mastery of our difficulties certainly is not possible,--but gradual improvement should be.

Attachment:

As stated.

Drafted: IO/PPR:AFNeidle/IO:SWLewis:jlh
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